

Healthcare Reform

Welcome to my blog! The first issue I want to discuss is health care.

As a nation, we face many great challenges to expand and provide affordable health care to all Americans. The current health care system is not working for too many people and I believe something dramatic must be done to reform it. Revamping health care is on the forefront of my mind, and it needs a very complex and extensive debate in Congress.

As the 111th Congress begins to consider health care reform, it is vital that we work together – not as Republicans or Democrats, but rather as Americans – for the greater good of our nation. We must remember that it is about the woman who can't afford health care on her salary, but gets diagnosed with lymphoma. It's about the man who lost his job and can't afford health care coverage on his own, but gets diagnosed with cancer. How are they possibly going to pay for their medical bills? Many Americans go bankrupt each year from the high costs of medical bills - which is outrageous. Helping that woman – helping that man – and the millions of other Americans who are without health care or barely hanging on to their existing coverage is extremely important.

In order to move forward, we must learn from past failures to try to overhaul the health care system, as well as ensure that we are placing a greater emphasis on the quality and cost of health care.

As a physician in Tennessee – dedicated to providing quality care to my patients and now serving you as a member of Congress – I am constantly looking for ways to provide affordable care in a strong and accountable system.

Recently, President Obama appointed Nancy-Ann DeParle as the director of the White House Office of Health Reform. She comes to this position with a great resume,

which I hope will be helpful for the many challenges ahead.

Ms.

DeParle also comes to the Administration with extensive experience in Tennessee when she ran the State Department of Human Services for then Governor Ned McWherter. Her service in Tennessee occurred during a turbulent time in our state, where she saw firsthand the pitfalls of an overly ambitious effort to overhaul the system. I hope she can apply the lessons of what went wrong with TennCare to any national reform so we avoid the same miscalculations and missteps that nearly bankrupted our state.

Right

now, it seems the Administration is placing a lot of emphasis on getting reforms enacted quickly. When devising these health care reforms for this country, we need to make sure we don't just do it fast, but we do it right. While reforms are needed, it's important to remember that a lot of Americans like the health care we have, and it's critical we identify the elements of our health care system that are worth preserving.

To

help lower the cost of healthcare and ensure it is universally accessible, I believe we should:

- Not supplant the private insurance market with government run health care;

- Create a new tax credit for individuals to purchase health insurance;

- Allow small businesses to have larger purchasing power by pooling their resources;

- Allow workers to have greater portability with their healthcare;

- Streamline the excessive paperwork and administrative burdens.

I also believe patients should have more control over and ownership of their health care. They should be able to purchase their health care across state lines, and use health savings accounts that can be coupled with catastrophic insurance plans. A basic health care plan doesn't have to be expensive to be effective.

We also need to examine reimbursements. Currently, a physician is incentivized to take care of sick patients, but neither the patient nor the physician has any incentive to stay healthy or seek preventative care like regular checkups. By incentivizing both providers and patients to take better care of themselves on the front end, we can save billions of dollars in unnecessary, over-consumed medical care.

I come to this Congress with a unique perspective - one that is from a physician's point of view, a patient's point of view and one that is from a legislator's point of view. I am dedicated to this debate and seeing reform come to our health care system. These thoughts are just a starting point to a great debate.

Please share your thoughts and suggestions regarding health care with me on your blog. I look forward to your positive comments on how we can reform the health care system.